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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 OUAGADOUGOU 000424

SIPDIS

AF/W FOR EMILY PLUMB, JASON HUTCHISON
AF/EPS FOR AMY BRIETER
USAID FOR AFR/WA
COMMERCE FOR SALIHA LOUCIF
TREASURY FOR OFFICE OF AFRICAN NATIONS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: BURKINA FASO: GENERAL STRIKE AGAINST THE RISING COST OF
LIVING ENDS WITHOUT INCIDENT

OUAGADOUGO 00000424 001.2 OF 002

Reftels: A) OUAGADOUGOU 132, B) OUAGADOUGOU 126,
C) OUAGADOUGOU 221, D) OUAGADOUGOU 263,
E) OUAGADOUGOU 309

1. Key Points:

- Burkinabe unions expressed satisfaction with their nationwide strike on May 13-15 to protest the rising cost of living.
- Participation was light in most cities and there were no incidents of violence. Between 6-8,000 peacefully participated in a May 14 rally in Ouagadougou. Government services were the most affected. Private Burkinabe-owned businesses remained open throughout the strike, while a limited number of foreign-owned businesses near march sites closed in the mornings.
- Unions plan other citywide closing of businesses should the government fail to address their complaints.

2. Key Judgments:

-- Merchants have largely ignored the Government's attempts to reduce prices on a small basket of food products by temporarily eliminating taxes; they also complain that that GOBF's attempts to limit gross margins on these products are ill considered and ignore market realities.

-- In Government may propose an increase, probably modest, in salaries and pensions in an attempt to placate the unions. The GOBF-union standoff is unlikely to be solved, however, until price rises subside and economic growth picks up.

End Key Points and Key Judgments.

Unions Three-Day General Strike was Peaceful, but Marchers Voiced
their Accusations against the Government Inaction

3. Burkinabe unions ended on May 15 their three-day nationwide strike against the rising cost of living. They met internally on May 13 and rallied peacefully on May 14 to request that the government meet their demands (ref E). Between 6-8,000 participated May 14 in Ouagadougou in a one-hour rally over a GOBF-approved, five-kilometer route. Some protesters accused the government of

conniving with business people to the detriment of the population. Bassolma Bazie, Deputy Secretary General of Burkina Faso General Workers Confederation, for example, told Political Assistant that the Burkinabe government, unlike its Malian counterpart, was unwilling to control prices because it was a shareholder in most big businesses in Burkina Faso.

Unions Consider Strike a Success

¶4. Union sources expressed satisfaction with the success of their three-day nationwide strike. According to them, approximately 60-95 percent of Burkinabe workers participated in the strike. These statistics vary from one city to another and from one sector to another. According to Emboffs, the strike mostly affected public service sectors such as water, electricity, education, and health. Private Burkinabe businesses remained open. A limited number of foreign businesses like Lebanese owned-Marina Market food chains closed in the mornings, but opened in the afternoons.

Unions Plan Shift from Threat Level Yellow to Red if GOBF Remains Unresponsive to Complaints

¶5. Unions called on their coalition supporters from both public and private sectors, students, civil society including human rights groups, and political parties to stand up against the rising cost of living and corruption.